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STAT

MEDICAL DATA COULD HELP IN MENGELE PROBE

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SAO PAULO, BRAZIL

World War II medical data could yield solid evidence that a 6-year-old skeleton dug up in Brazil is that of Nazi war criminal Josef Mengele, a forensic pathologist says.

More than a week after the bones were exhumed from a suburban graveyard near Sao Paulo, the 17-member team of coroners from around the world finally received detailed medical records on Mengele Monday.

The Simon Wiesenthal Institute in Los Angeles sent the dossier to Brazil for comparison with the cleaned, reassembled skeleton unearthed June 6.

"I am satisfied it (the dossier) will give us enough to make the necessary comparison," forensic pathologist Wilmes Teixeira said.

Amid charges authorities had bungled the exhumation of Mengele's remains, experts who reopened the grave Monday sifted through the dirt and found hair and bone fragments they retrieved for laboratory analysis.

Members of the forensic team denied a report in the Jornal do Brasil newspaper quoting unidentified officials as saying they were guilty of improper procedures.

"The (first) exhumation was perfect," said team member Jose Antonio de Mello. "What we picked up this second time will be used for a more meticulous examination."

American and West German experts have confirmed Brazilian calculations that the skeleton was of a Caucasian man who was the right height, ethnic group and age at death to be Mengele.

The experts planned to evaluate a plethora of other details, such as hair fragments, blood type, bone abnormalities, skull dimensions, and the seven remaining teeth, a coroner said.

Teixeira said the dossier from Nazi hunter Wiesenthal contained wartime X-rays, a pre-war dental chart and information about a motorcycle accident Mengele suffered during World War II.

Police investigations have established that Mengele, charged with the deaths of 400,000 concentration camp inmates, mostly Jews, entered Brazil in 1960 or 1961 and lived quietly on small farms and in urban hideouts, federal police chief Romeu Tuma said.

Numerous witnesses have testified either to knowing Mengele's real identity or to knowing him by another name.

American graphologists, including a former CIA document analyst, identified Mengele's handwriting on papers police believe he wrote in Brazil.

Tuma admitted, however, that evidence showed Mengele had lived in Brazil but did not prove he died there. Only morgue tests could do that.

Tuma has said he is satisfied the case is not a hoax. He said such a plot was too elaborate, set up over too many years and involved too many people -- many of them illiterate peasants -- to be so solid.